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ABSTRACT

Eight on-site visits (focusing on school districts which did not use federal Vocational Education Act funds) were made with state vocational education administrators and rural school superintendents in two states to identify factors related to providing vocational education to rural secondary students, to ascertain why some rural districts did not apply for federal and/or state vocational education funds, and to establish what vocational education services students in those districts received. Local superintendents were most concerned about finding and keeping certified vocational teachers. The small amount of money and the volume of paperwork entailed discouraged some from applying for federal funds. Reasons for not wanting to join or contract with area vocational schools included cost, travel, distance, and political considerations. A number felt that their own industrial arts programs were best suited to their students and community. Some superintendents were not sure whether the requirements which concerned them were federal or state. State level vocational administrators were also concerned about the proper role and funding for industrial arts and career education programs. Both states were in the process of developing multi-occupational cooperative programs. State officials had more direct problems with and suggestions for changing federal law than local officials had. Data indicated that cooperative efforts of federal, state, and local educators were needed to resolve the issues of rural vocational programs. (CM)

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NON-RECEIPT OF FEDERAL VEA FUNDS: WHY SOME DISTRICTS DON'T APPLY (and other issues related to rural vocational secondary education)

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October, 1980

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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RC 012572

(This study was conducted under contract from the National Institute of Education. The opinions expressed are solely those of the researcher.)

PREFACE

This report is one of 11 small contracted studies and commissioned papers of the "Intramural Study of Vocational Education in Rural and Sparsely Settled Areas." This study is, in turn, part of the larger Vocational Education Study being conducted by the National Institue of Education (NIE) under mandate from Congress (Education Amendments of 1976). As noted by S. Rosenfeld (memo, January, 1980), the Intramural Study is:

> . . . predicated on the assumption that distinctive features of rural areas of the United States affect both the composition and content of vocational education programs and the manner in which they are provided and, therefore, deserve special attention in policy formation. . . . Despite large regional differences among rural communities, it is presumed that the impacts of scale and isolation systematically influence policy issues" (p. 1).

Dr. Katrhyn A. Hecht, independent consultant residing in San Francisco, was contracted directly by NIE in the amount of five thousand dollars to conduct this small study and produce an interim and final report. A stipulation of this contract required the contractor to supplement work underway at the School of Education, University of California, Berkeley (UCB), contractor for the distribution of Vocational Education Act (VEA) funds study. Coordination was to include using available documentation as well as contacts already established by the UCB study staff with their sample states. The UCB study also was able to augment the funds provided to Hecht by supporting limited travel which was not part of the original contract and budget.

This study and final report are intended to identify problems and issues relating to why some rural districts do not use federal vocational education funds as well as more general issues concerning use of vocational funds in rural schools from the perspective of state and local vocational administrators. Because of its limited size, the study is an attempt to identify issues rather than provide answers. It is hoped that some of the problems highlighted in this report, along with the results of the other rural studies, will stimulate further study and possible legislative and administrative action at federal, state, and local levels.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to acknowledge the cooperation of those state vocational administrators and rural school superintendents who gave so willingly of their time and thoughts. In order that they may remain anonymous, no specific thank yous are appropriate. The author also is grateful for the encouragement to undertake this project from Dr. Stuart Rosenfeld and his help in refining the thrust of the study.

The author also is indebted to Dr. Charles Benson, Principal Investigator, and Dr. E. Gareth Hoachlander, Project Director, of the University of California, Berkeley, Project on National Vocational Education Resources, for their advice, support, and fine colleagueship throughout the project. Numerous members of the UCB study staff also were most helpful.

The author is grateful to all of the above mentioned persons but is solely responsible for the work reported. The views expressed are those of the author and the people she interviewed and do not represent the position or policy of the National Institute of Education.

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I. INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

Rural communities are as diverse as the culture and ethnicity of their populations, their geographic locations, and their economic conditions. What they do share in common is their small size and relative isolation. The advantages and disadvantages of educating children in rural communities as opposed to larger, urban and nearby suburban communities are frequently debated. But there can be no argument about the fact that the provision of education for rural communities of small populations, often spread over large areas and distant from their nearest neighboring communuities, has its own unique problems and challenges.

This small study was directed at beginning to identify those special factors related to providing vocational education to rural secondary students, specifically focused on school districts who do not use federal Vocational Education Act (VEA) funds. The question of why some rural districts do not apply for federal (and often state) vocational education funds and what vocational education services their students may or may not receive was of primary concern. Current federal data collection and other research efforts do not provide information on districts who do not receive VEA funds. This question and other related topics was discussed in the field with state vocational administrators and rural school superintendents in the two selected study states.

The first section of this report describes the study design and how it was refined and implemented. The second section summarizes the problems and issues identified during the site visits.

Overall, the investigator found local superintendents most concerned about finding and keeping vocational teachers who could meet state standards. Besides teacher difficulties, the small amount of money and the large amount of paper work discouraged some from applying for federal funds. Reasons for not wanting to join or contract with area vocational schools included cost, travel, distance, and political considerations. Districts not receiving federal and/or state vocational funds often had their own industrial arts type program, which some felt better suited their community and small numbers of students than specialized vocational offerings. Superintendents, who were the vocational administrators for their schools,

seemed overloaded with various federal programs' requirements with which they had to keep up. In discussion, they sometimes were not sure whether the requirements which concerned them were federal or state.

At the state level, vocational administrators also were concerned about the proper role and funding for Industrial Arts as well as career education programs. Many felt the setasides in the 1976 Amendments unfairly complicated the mission of vocational education. Among ideas for improving small rural vocational programs, multi-occupational cooperative programs were under development in both states. State officials, not surprisingly, had more direct problems with and suggestions for changing the federal law.

Although there were differences in emphases between state and local concerns, a reading of both suggests that there are issues particular to rural vocational programs and that resolution would require the combined thought and efforts of federal, state, and local educators. However, it should also be noted that many of the issues raised about vocational education are relevant to the delivery of all education services in rural communities, and they should not be considered in isolation.

There is no claim that the findings cited in this report are generalizable to all rural communities. The study was seen as an opportunity for some educational administrators at state and local levels to voice their concerns about vocational education in rural communities and for these to be transmitted to the federal policy level. The potential impact of this effort will be as one of several small rural studies within the larger NIE Vocational Education Study currently being conducted under Congressional mandate. Hopefully, the combined information from the rural studies will serve to bring attention to rural concerns, influence policy setting, and stimulate further research efforts.

II. STUDY DESIGN AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

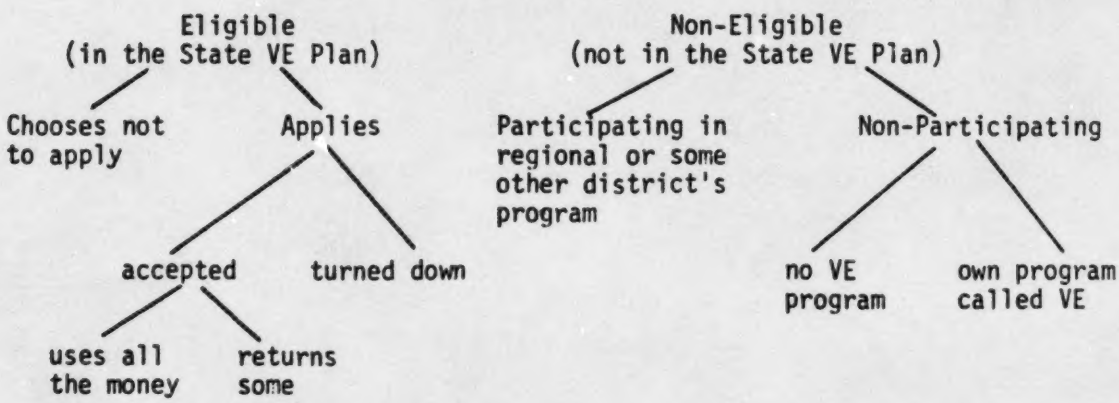
Scope of the Study

The original purpose of the contract as outlined by NIE was to look for state level explicit and implicit policies and attitudes toward rural schools and their impact on rural school districts in several of the "core" states in the broader Vocational Education Study. The scope was redefined with the concurrence of NIE to be: more focused in terms of issues; include viewpoints of local as well as state administrators; and be more realistic within time and budget constraints.*

The study as redefined focused on the issue of non-participation by secondary school districts in federal and state funded vocational education programs (or non-receipt of federal and/or state vocational education funds). The issue was considered significant, encompassing several types of questions and an area about which no information was available nor currently being researched. Although it is generally assumed that those secondary districts who do not receive federal VEA funds are small, rural ones, information at the federal level is not collected on districts who do not receive funds, nor is anything known about their reasons for not participating or the vocational services received by students within these districts.

The following decision matrix was designed to further define the possible instances of non-receipt/non-participation:

All Operating Secondary Districts



*K. Hecht, Interim Report, Order # NIE-P-80-0005, April 25, 1980.

Looking at non-receipt/non-participation in this way suggests that there are two major conerns within the overall topic. The first is the concern for students who may be excluded from vocational education because programs are not offered locally (in their district). This concern can be examined mainly among those districts under the Non-Eligible branch. It also can be examined in those districts who are eligible but choose not to apply and those who apply and are turned down, if these decisions work against serving student needs.

The second major concern related to how federal money is being used and can be examined among those districts and decision points is found under the Eligible branch.

There are many issues which may arise within this framework. One of interest to the contractor is looking at those districts who fall in the "non-eligible, non-participating, own program" group to see if what they offer as vocational education is different from the types of programs offered in those districts which must comply with federal and state regulations.

Another issue indirectly related has to do with innovative/demonstration programs to improve training opportunities for individuals in rural locations. There are funds available to states under Sec. 132 (a)(2). There may also be innovative practices under basic grants or in those districts using only local funds. While the major thrust of the study was concerned with the problems underlying non-participation, promising practices to confront some of these problems also was sought.

Preliminary Survey

Before proceeding further, it was decided to survey the sample of ten states from the UCB study. Eight of the ten state vocational education directors, or their designated contact, were called and interviewed. (One state was excluded because its participation in the UCB study was still under negotiation and in another, the appropriate person was not available.) The survey served as the base information to both choose the states and to further develop questions and issues for the site visits.

The following questions were asked of the sample states:

1) How many operating secondary districts are not in the state vocational education plan (or are not eligible to receive state and federal money)?
2) Of those that are in the plan, how many do not apply?
3) Of those who apply, how many are not approved and/or do not receive funds?
4) Of those who receive funds, how many turn back at least some of the money?

It should be noted that during these phone interviews, state directors were not asked to do any research to answer the questions, and estimated or "don't know" answers were acceptable. The results of the phone survey were reported in full to NIE in the Interim Report (April 1980) and are summarized here.

In all but one of the states contacted, all districts were in the plan or were eligible to receive funds. In one state with relatively large sized districts, all districts participated. In one other, all students theoretically were offered an opportunity through area vocational schools, although no information was kept at the state level as to how many districts actually had students receiving area school services. In the rest of the states, there were some number of districts who did not participate. In one state, this was said to include mostly a few wealthy ones. In two others, only a very few (five or less) did not participate, usually because the amount of money was too small. The three remaining states had a more sizeable number of non-participating districts which were mostly small and rural. One state did not have current figures and did not wish to estimate. For the other two, the percentage of districts not receiving federal and/or state VE funds was 9% and 19%. These latter two states were chosen as the location of the site visits. (Of course, approval from the state director of vocational education was requested and obtained in both cases.)

Concerning the question about non-approval of applications and return of funds, no problems specific to rural areas were identified. There was some concern expressed about the ability of rural districts to use the setaside portions of the Vocational Act funds.

The Selected States and the Site Visits

During May and June 1980, site visits of one week duration each were made to two states chosen because of their relatively high proportion of non-participating districts. One state would be considered primarily rural and a mid-western or plain state, highly dependent on agriculture and its related businesses, and with a stable population. The other state has several large urban centers as well as many small rural communities, is diversified as to farming and industry, and has been growing in population. It would be considered a western, mountain state.

In preparation for the site visits, the investigator reviewed five year and annual plans plus other documents available from the UCB study files. Also, a site visit information sheet was prepared to give state and local administrators a brief introduction to the study and its purpose as well as to provide a list of questions/issues suggested for discussion (see Appendix). A copy was given to each person with whom the investigator visited. Questions were divided into three sections: 1) for districts who do not receive federal vocational education funds, 2) for districts who do receive federal vocational education funds, and 3) for all rural districts and state officials. (This handout was used mostly for information and to get discussion started; seldom did the interview follow the suggested questions. The investigator did not attempt to follow the handout if the person led the discussion in other directions.)

At the time the state directors of vocational education were contacted in order to obtain their approval and to set a date for the visit, the investigator asked for the directors' assistance in selecting rural districts to visit. In both cases, the state directors or a designated person offered to select the sites and make contacts with the superintendents. In both cases, it was felt that the advantage of entree through the state officials far offset possible bias. It was this same rationale that led the investigator to accept the offer of being accompanied by a state person in making the actual visits to rural communities. (Although this might now always be the case, in both states the investigator felt the person which accompanied her facilitated the school visit and provided very useful contextual information.)

During the two weeks of field work, 23 interviews lasting anywhere from 30 minutes to 3-1/2 hours were conducted, 12 with vocational adminis-

trators at the state level, including the two directors and nine with local school superintendents. Among the school districts, four had no federal or state vocational funds, two had less than $500 apiece for consumer home economics, and two offered office practice and either agriculture or welding, funded by state and/or federal funds. One was an Indian reservation school with no categorically funded vocational programs. A more complete description of the districts visited follows.

Description of the School Districts Visited and Their Vocational Offerings

Eight rural school districts were visited, four in each state. The smallest secondary program had 14 students in grades 9-12, drawn from a 20-mile radius. Five had less than 100 students in 9-12, two had less than 200 students, and one had 500, drawn from 30 square miles. The towns in which these high school programs were located had populations ranging from 150 people to almost 5000. Three were over 1000, and one over 2000. (The one larger school in the one larger community was selected because it had recently given up federal and state vocational funds.)

In the first state visited, two of the four districts received consumer home economics funding (less than $400 each). No other state or federal funds were received. All of the districts visited had some form of home economics and industrial arts. Some IA programs were more extensive than others, ranging from "shop" to eight subjects. There was some office occupations training. The one larger high school mentioned above used to have four approved vocational programs and now, without federal or state funds, has more offerings of a less intensive nature.

In the second state visited, the state had selected two rural districts with no state or federal vocational funds plus two that had funded programs as a contrast.* For those two with no outside funding, one had previously contracted with a nearby district and one never had an approved program. Both had business or typing, and home economics. The other two districts had state approved vocational programs and received funding for agriculture (26 students) and office practice (3 students) in the first, and office practice (22 students) and welding (20 students) in the second. The

*In this sample state, federal VEA money is not used for basic program funding at the secondary level. However, since state program approval is necessary for districts to receive federal or state vocational funds, reasons for and impact of non-participation should be similar.

welding and office practice programs in the latter district were provided at the local high school through a contract with a community college. It also had a locally funded home economics and work study program.

One Indian reservation high school was also visited. It was a partially residential school serving 168 students in grades 7-12. The reservation high school had limited general shop, secretarial and home economics programs but received no special vocational funding [and the superintendent was unaware that any existed].

III. PRESENTATION OF LOCAL AND STATE COMMENTS

This section reports information and opinions obtained from site visits with state vocational education administrators and rural school superintendents. Topics ranged beyond those of non-receipt of federal vocational funds to include more general rural vocational, rural, and vocational education concerns.

The comments are presented with minimal analysis in order that the opinions gathered can be reviewed by others as well as the investigator. The comments are grouped by topic. The reader will note overlaps and inter-relationships among topical areas. No attempt was made to avoid this as it is a realistic indication of the complexity of some of the issues.

The first three topics (Non-Receipt of Federal and/or State Vocational Funds; Area Vocational Schools and Contracts; and Teacher Related Problems) describe specific reasons reported by superintendents for not having federal and/or state funded programs in their districts and not sending students to regional centers or to other districts for vocational training. Teacher related problems are included here as a separate topic, as it seemed to be an area of great concern to rural administrators and one which impacts their ability to use federal and state vocational funds.

The next several topics (Some Specific Vocational Programs; Industrial Arts; Career Education; Sex Equity; and Community Involvement) describe comments on vocational education in the rural districts. It is based on the local site visits as well as more general information on rural programs from state vocational supervisors.

Next, Innovative Programs as reported by state and local administrators are presented. One particular promising practice under consideration just for rural schools (Multi-Occupational Cooperative Education Vocational Programs) is discussed separately.

Following vocational programs and innovations are topics concerning administration of rural vocational programs. This includes the difficult situation for rural superintendents (Rural Vocational Administrators), their suggestions (Problems and Suggestions--Local), and their overall program concerns (Vocational Education Philosophy).

The last four topics mostly express concerns of vocational education administrators at the state level (The Vocational Education Act and

Regulations, and Federal Funds) and some state administrative activities (State Planning, and Research and Related Activities).

Non-Receipt of Federal (and/or State) Vocational Funds

Several reasons were given by superintendents for not applying for federal (and/or state) vocational funds. The most frequent reason mentioned was teachers: difficulty in finding teachers who meet state vocational requirements* and in keeping them especially given competition from industry. (See Teacher Related Problems). The next most frequent reason can be paraphrased as 'not worth the time and paper work for the money involved.' To complete all the necessary federal forms for sums as low as several hundred dollars was not judged by several superintendents to be an effective use of their time. (Most of the superintendents interviewed also did the work of federal programs coordinator and the vocational administrator plus varied other functions which would be performed by support staff in larger school districts. See Rural Vocational Administrators.)

Other comments were heard less frequently. One superintendent noted that it was not worth the cost of redoing facilities for a vocational program given the small number of students involved. Another noted that the programs they already had were not that different from approved ones and that given the problems of finding teachers who meet state vocational standards, it was not felt necessary to have a state approved program. One superintendent had withdrawn from receiving state and federal money because he differed from the state officials on the intensity of the program offering--he now has more vocational offerings of shorter duration (see Philosophy of Vocational Education).

In a similar vein, several districts were satisfied with or would rather expand their Industrial Arts program, which was not a state approvable vocational program in either state visited (see Industrial Arts). General problems of local funding for any new programs also were noted in several locations.

Area Vocational Schools and Contracting

Besides programs in their own high schools, rural districts have other

*Districts must have state approved programs and be part of the State Plan for Vocational Education in order to receive federal funds.

options for providing vocational education for their students. Among these, they can join in, be part of, an area or regional multi-district vocational facility, or they can contract to send their students to these schools or to another school district with a vocational program. All of the districts visited had decided against these options, for a variety of reasons.

First, in both states there were area schools available in a large portion of the state. The communities visited had not joined to form area schools for both practical and political reasons. On the practical level, one can include isolation, transportation time and costs, and money. When asked why communities in the area had not joined to form a vocational school, one superintendent said, "It would never work around here--could never consolidate districts enough around here because of distance." Another noted that when the state first discussed the requirements, that the number of students needed and the money required for evaluation meant that they would have to include too large an area to be practical. Several mentioned that transportation time was a problem (time in addition to the travel many students already had done to get to the local high school) and that it would make it hard to fit in all the required subjects. Transportation costs were also a problem, especially in light of current energy shortages. Uncertain finances due to pending tax cuts and changes in state finance plans were also mentioned, as well as a lack of monetary incentives from the state to start new area schools.

The political reasons for not joining an area school were related to the history of forced district consolidation and fears of losing the community high school. One superintendent noted that in his community there was "a lot of hard feeling toward H------ (the town where the area school would have been located). . . feel H------ tried to destroy our community during reorganization. . . the state legislature left districts to kill each other off during reorganization." Another noted school reorganization created great animosity, and the regional vocation centers came soon after. Two superintendents said they had considered joining other districts, but the community felt it would lead to closing the school. (One personally felt just the opposite, that joining might be what would allow the high school to continue.) Another reason given is that the School Board felt that with only one vote on the multi-district board, they would not have enough control.

Reasons for not contracting with established centers or nearby districts with approved programs were very similar to those for not joining area schools. Bad feeling due to consolidation efforts and transportation time, and costs were again mentioned. The Board that did want just one vote as part of an area board also rejected contracting because then it would have no vote and could only place students in left-over slots. The small number of students was mentioned in several ways: the board did not think it was worth the costs for a few students; "for two or three, federal/state money isn't enough to cover excess costs;" and removing even a few students from already marginal size classes made it harder to justify an adequate curriculum in the home school and keep the faculty intact.

In questioning one superintendent who was trying to attract other districts nearby to contract for vocational services from his district's underutilized facility, he gave two reasons why the nearby smaller districts would not contract: (1) athletic competition is taken very seriously and leaves bad feelings, even affects the merchants in town*, and (2) they are jealous of the vocational facility.

One rural high school visited had contracted with a community college to provide welding and office education. Courses were given at the high school, and personnel were hired from the community. The superintendent was very pleased with the arrangement as it freed him from having to handle the administrative details.

In questioning state officials in both states visited about the possibility of opening more area vocational schools, they agreed that the ones easiest to arrange had been established, and it was unlikely more would follow.

Teacher Related Problems

Problems of hiring and retention coupled with state vocational teacher standards was one of the major factors discouraging districts from applying for state and federal vocational funds. This in turn created program-related issues for small schools.

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*His school is considerably bigger than the neighboring ones. They all play football in the same league. The larger school wins most of the time. Some of the schools they compete with are so small that every boy has to play to have a footbal team--and they do!

First, it is necessary to understand that in the two states under study (and in most others), in addition to state standards for teacher certification, there are additional qualifications one must meet to receive a vocational credential. In order to have a state approved vocational program (and thus be eligible for state and/or federal funds), the teacher must meet the credentialing requirements. One of the main requirements for a credential is work experience in a specific vocation. As a state vocational administrator explained, vocational training should be "true" skill training, and one has to have performed the skill to teach it.

Teachers in general are more difficult to recruit and retain in rural communities. In one of the states, it was estimated that the turnover in rural districts was better than 30 percent a year. Vocational teachers seem particularly hard to find and keep because of competition from industry for people with vocational skills, especially with its ability to pay better salaries. (This seemed particularly true for vocational agriculture teachers.)

The necessity for the vocational credential combines with hiring problems. Several districts expressed reluctance about applying for vocational funds, or problems with maintaining their current state approved programs, because it is difficult to find teachers who have vocational credentials. Several superintendents mentioned they felt they could or have hired teachers who were "qualified" in their judgment but who did not meet credentialing requirements.* For example, one district has a certified business teacher but cannot apply for vocational funds for a typing program because she does not meet credentialing requirements.

Another program implication is what the investigator calls "teacher-dependent programs." The availability of a credentialed teacher, more than student needs, may determine approved vocational program offerings. This is even a greater potential problem in the smaller rural schools which more often apply for a combined program, because it is especially hard to find a replacement teacher with the appropriate combination of vocational credentials.

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*One state administrator countered that the requirements were not that demanding and that there were various appeal and exception processes available.

Some Specific Vocational Programs

Under this topic, comments received on specific vocational programs in rural high schools are noted. (Industrial Arts and Multi-Occupational Cooperative Education Vocational programs are considered as separate topics.)

The most frequently encountered program during the site visits was home economics. (Some were receiving federal or state vocational funds, and others were wholly locally supported.) In the cases observed, there were no males or very few in the regular program. Several schools had set up what is sometimes called "bachelor living," a special, usually shorter, home economics course for males. (See Sexism for further discussion.)

At the state level, there were some comments concerning whether consumer home economics should be part of vocational education. One vocational administrator said: "It has been the stepchild of Vocational Education for years. . . there is no continuity in skill building." He added that to be in an occupational home economics program, one is required to pick a specific area, such as fry cook or babysitter, which he felt was too limited an experience. Most superintendents seemed to accept home economics as a regular part of the high school curriculum, one noting: "I believe it serves the dual role of women." However, one superintendent said he was contemplating dropping it but he did not want to lose a good math/science teacher--the husband of the home economics teacher!

The next most frequently encountered or discussed program was vocational agriculture. Several superintendents noted that if they had resources to add a program, it would be vocational agriculture. But, they also noted that even if they had the resources, it would be unlikely they could find a teacher with both the academic and vocational qualifications. A state official said it would be unlikely to find a "Voc Ag" program in a high school of less than 100.

One superintendent switched to an Industrial Arts program because only a small proportion of the students who took "Voc Ag" ended up in agriculture, and his district did not have enough students for both facilities. Another superintendent, also discussing the placement issue, said he was not concerned about it, that "the most beneficial aspect [of vocational agriculture] was attitude toward work" and that the federal definition of intent was

too narrow, that "almost everything in a rural community is agriculture related." He added that "what a student really learns is management." When asked, "Why not teach that?", he replied that he would if the same quality program was available statewide and nationally.

The latter statements speak to comments heard elsewhere, that vocational agriculture is the most sophisticated of vocational programs in rural schools and considered an elite program in a rural school. It is a four-year program where most others are two. The related student association is very active. The program has mostly male students, although in one state they were proud to note they had three female "Voc Ag" teachers.

There was some indication in the states visited that the number of vocational agriculture programs on a statewide basis will grow slightly rather than decrease. In some areas, personpower needs have increased, except for manual labor, especially in services and sales related to production agriculture. One vocational agriculture administrator noted that he felt the four-year program approach was best and that regional centers (offering programs for juniors and seniors) could not do as much. It seems unlikely that the smallest rural schools could add such programs.

Two other programs received some attention. Work-study efforts were underway in two of the districts visited, neither were approved vocational programs. One was an informal arrangement where seniors could work in the afternoon and employers agreed to set up objectives, but students received no credit. The second one was set up with federal funds for potential drop-outs, with a special teacher for intensive remedial work and a half-day job in the community.

Although none of the schools visited had auto mechanics, it was brought up at the state level as a program often requested in somewhat larger rural high schools. Although one trade and industry specialist felt more programs should not be funded, because there was not enough need for the numbers being trained, another felt it was "better for students to learn early what you don't want to do" and that there is some useful carry-over to other occupations. Although in one state the placement rate for auto mechanics was not considered satisfactory, no programs had been terminated for that reason.

Industrial Arts

Industrial Arts (IA) seemed an important issue at both state and local levels and drew more diverse opinions than any other topic. (See also Career Education and Vocational Education Philosophy for related comments.)

Although IA is an option under the Vocational Education Act, in neither state visited was it considered an approvable vocational education program for state or federal funds, or under the supervision of state vocational administrators. As mentioned previously in this report, among the small rural districts visited, it was a popular high school subject and often the only "vocational" training other than home economics supported by the districts. In several of these high schools, almost all the male students and from zero to 15 percent of the girls take IA. Programs ranged from "shop" to one program with eight specific skill areas. Welding, drafting, and carpentry were typical areas.

Several rural superintendents who supported IA and would like to be able to expand their programs felt it was well suited to the vocational needs of rural communities, with mixed employment opportunities and small numbers of students. It was seen variously as pre-vocational in the sense that students could continue their training at postsecondary institutions, as vocational in that graduates could get jobs, and also as "leisure-time." The needs seemed to be for additional materials, equipment and facilities to improve and expand programs. One superintendent wanted to hire a full-time IA teacher; another wanted to hire someone specialized in small engine mechanics--neither felt it possible given the small number of students. No one was interested in giving up industrial arts in favor of an approvable vocational program.

At the state level, there seemed to be a general sentiment that although IA was a worthwhile activity, it was not vocational and should not be funded as such. State vocational administrators differed in their interpretations of what the mission of IA should be. One state official saw it as leisure-time. A more common opinion is that it should serve as a "feeder for vocational education" and "to help young people make [career] decisions." One saw it as career exploration and part of career education while another saw it as introductory to vocational education. Another, agreeing with

the exploratory opinion, went on to say:

> IA is supposed to be a study of industry and its processes, including theory and lab. What they are teaching now is antiquated. IA is not skill development but exploratory. It is an important part of education but not vocational education because it doesn't prepare [students] for jobs.

Despite these opinions, the major concern at the state level was that IA not take vocational state and federal funds from approved programs and dilute them. When asked if they would be in favor of IA as approved vocational training if additional funds were available to support it, at least one official in each state favored the idea to some extent:

> I might go for it if there was extra money and it was for small schools only, but it would be very costly to equip. You could equip it for less than an approved vocational program.

> It would be OK if funds were earmarked for small schools to provide exploratory experiences in industrial occupations.

> If we had more money, I would like to see us take over IA supervision; provide technical assistance to upgrade programs, make them relevant to today's jobs--would still be exploratory. For example, 'world of construction'--one would look at career possibilities rather than teach skills.

The latter speaker also suggested units in transportation and agriculture-related industry. One of the other above speakers saw a danger in this route, as he felt it might serve to support small schools that "probably shouldn't exist" and would discourage cooperative and contract concepts.

In suggesting changes in the federal law, one state administrator felt the option to fund IA should be removed, as people see the option as an expected.

Career Education

Career education is not funded under the Vocational Education Act, and in neither state visited was it the responsibility of the vocational administrators. However, the topic came up in relation to Industrial Arts and on its own, as an unmet need especially in small rural schools. All of the comments expressed here were from the state viewpoint. (It was not discussed at the local level, except in relation to the need for better vocational guidance services.)

In both states visited, it appeared that career education has almost ceased to exist on the state level since the withdrawal of federal funds for this purpose. In one state, the state plan for career education was said to have died when the state legislature did not approve expenditure of federal funds because they would have had to pick up the program in five years. The other state had phased out most of the state program.

In both states, the remnants of the career education program appeared to have been divided between the vocational and general elementary and secondary units. As with industrial arts, vocational state officials felt it was worthwhile but not vocational education. It seemed to the investigator that career education has fallen between the cracks, with neither group willing to take responsibility for career education nor considering it a priority item.

Unfortunately, according to one state administrator, lack of career education is more prevalent in rural schools. He added, "Career education can make a bigger impact on [students taking] vocational education than anything else."

Sex Equity

Since some federal vocational funds are targeted to promote sex equity, this was an issue the investigator kept in mind while visiting schools. In one state visited, the only state administrative funds available for this activity were from federal sources ($50,000). (In the other state, this information was not obtained.)

As noted earlier under descriptions of the most common vocational-type programs in the small rural schools visited, most home economics and industrial arts courses were virtually sex-segregated. In questioning superintendents about this, they seemed aware of current laws and state efforts concerning sex equity. When asked why there was not more crossover of males and females between home economics and industrial arts, one superintendent said simply, "We don't encourage it."

The only exception to this pattern seemed to be special courses, still segregated. For example, at one school senior boys take home economics and senior girls take shop for one nine week period. Several schools (including the Indian reservation school) talked about having or thinking about setting up "bachelor" courses (special home economics) for the boys.

One superintendent noted that a few girls do take IA but they do not go on to postsecondary vocational technical courses (as the boys often do). He said that "girls still think a nine month secretarial course will help them get a good job."

When one superintendent was asked if "parenting" skills were taught at his high school, he replied, "The girls get all that in home economics; boys probably don't get that."

Take, for example, one high school offering IA and Home Economics (some federal vocational funds supporting the latter). The enrollment pattern was:

	Male	Female
IA	60	2
Home Ecnomics	1	60

The superintendent said the highest switchover was five or six students in the first year it was "allowed." When asked why this pattern persisted, he replied, "Knitting and crocheting sort the boys out*. . . girls are afraid of welding."

In this school district and one other, the superintendent stated specifically that they would like to increase their IA offerings. This comment was followed by an explanation that almost all the boys currently took IA and therefore they could not increase enrollment to justify expansion [ignoring the potential to increase enrollment by attracting girls into the IA program].

At the state level, one sex equity coordinator said that the only vocational education area with fairly equal male/female numbers was distributive education, but placements still were usually in traditional roles.

Asked whether he had seen any change in the rural areas, one state administrator said that "maybe [there had been] some attitude change," but because of the high turnover in administrators, there was a need to keep training. He added that "rural communities don't see it [sexism] as an issue or concern."

Another state official felt industry was ahead of schools in looking for non-sexist placement and that therefore the argument of 'why train them, if they can't get a job' was no longer justified.

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*He went on further to explain that one must take all the home economic skills, that they did not want to revise the curriculum, and that the home economics teacher felt knitting and crocheting were "essential."

One state director noted that rural communities are conservative and the change process slow: "It's a long process to introduce change and convince the legislature it is worthwhile." Although he agreed that there seemed to be some change in attitude, he added that after five years of sex equity funding, they did not expect to "see much different that couldn't have happened without it."

Community Involvement

Given emphasis in recent rural education rhetoric on the importance of community involvement, there was surprisingly little evidence during the site visits.

Community influence was brought up in relation to accounting for the almost non-existent drop-out problem in the communities visited. It was said that adults in these communities see high school graduation as important. One added that there "just wasn't much else to do in town." However, this high completion ratio was followed, at least in one of the states, by a low postsecondary enrollment of students from small communities. One explanation was that "students don't see the importance of going on."

In one very small town, the superintendent noted that the seniors didn't have much to do their senior year and that he had wanted to set up some sort of "co-op" program. The Board was opposed to students working in the community because they felt "someone [the employer] might benefit." They also were opposed to travel outside the community for insurance and liability reasons. The superintendent had managed to arrange for a ten-day senior trip--"in small schools, the kids need to get out."

There was no clear pattern which emerged concerning the graduates of these small high schools. One superintendent said some students come back but the town doesn't have much to offer them. Another said the boys come back but the girls get married or go on to school. He added that counseling "probably was not as extensive as it should be."

There were few comments at the local level relating school to community development. One superintendent said he was looking for a farm-related industry and would like to set up a related high school program, but he did not have trained people to do the paper work to attract industry. His community had previously had a project to build apartments, but, as he put it: "The [federal] paper work and regulations were terrible--wouldn't do it again. [We] need more money with less strings."

Innovative Programs

Both state and local vocational administrators were asked if they knew of any innovative vocational programs for rural districts. (Local administrators did not provide much input in this area.) Responses received were of two types: (1) descriptions of programs in operation, and (2) suggested innovations. Actual programs identified as innovative are described first.

Two of the programs described as innovative for rural schools used mobile units to serve many districts during the school year. Both were state run with federal vocational funds, exemplary and guidance. In one state, mobile units, each specialized in one vocational area, circulated in one especially rural area of the state without an area vocational facility. A state administrator called it more of an exploratory program, career awareness, than vocational. When asked if there were plans to expand the mobile program to other areas, he said there would not be adequate funds and that it was hard to maintain staff.

The other mobile program consisted of two career guidance vans which cover half the state (excluding the major urban areas) each year. They stay from a few days to two weeks, stop only on request, and serve students and teachers, as well as adults in the community. The administrator in that state felt they would like to do away with the van and provide more consistent vocational guidance services through area schools. In this direction, there is a pilot program just starting which funds vocational specialists at area schools to train general school counselors. (As an aside, the guidance van is made available in the summer for CETA to use with migrant workers.)

One state visited requires area vocational schools to serve both secondary and postsecondary students. Administrators there felt mixing secondary and postsecondary students in some classes was an innovation that was working well. Besides increasing numbers to be able to offer a greater variety of specialized classes in each rural locale, it was said to provide the "best of both worlds [in the classroom]--maturity of the adults and enthusiasm of youth."

Two additional areas for possible innovation were mentioned at the state level. The first was use of the residential school. One specific suggestion was an exploratory summer program. Removing high school students from their home community and school seemed a major drawback, even among some who suggested it.

The second area was scheduling, both at the local school and with area schools. It was pointed out that many rural schools follow very traditional scheduling patterns, whereas it should be easier to use flexible scheduling with small student bodies. With area schools, districts usually send students for a half day every day. Given problems of travel time and costs, two alternatives were suggested. Both would have students at the area school for a whole day. In one, seniors only would attend full time, taking both academic and vocational courses. In the other, students would go only every other day, for a full day of vocational courses. Besides saving cost and transportation time, the latter suggestion is said to have two other advantages: it is more like a realistic work day, and requires less preparation and clean-up time. While one community college was known to be considering the first alternative, no one was known to be using the second. (See also "Multi-Occupational Cooperative Education.")

Multi-Occupational Cooperative Education Vocational Programs

Both states visited were in the process of designing or experimenting with some form of multi-occupational cooperative education vocational programs, for small schools only. It was generally thought of as a solution for not having enough students to afford to offer a selection of separate approved vocational programs. The concept would have the individual students choose one vocational area (as opposed to industrial arts), but there would be a number of program areas available from which to choose, and not everyone had to make the same choice. The cooperative aspect refers to on-the-job experience in student's chosen vocational area. There were a number of problems discussed by state officials in implementing such a concept, some relating to the federal law.

Traditionally, cooperative programs were mostly limited to distributive education (DE). With this new concept, cooperative education was to be more of a process than a separate program, applicable to any vocation.

The most difficult issue in each state seemed to be who should coordinate or teach such a program. One state person felt that a new philosophy of cooperative education needed to be built into teacher training. Another suggested it should not be a DE teacher but could be a counselor who would teach general job skill activities while employers became instructors

in their own areas. One suggested anyone with a vocational credential should be allowed to teach it. Another suggested someone part-time from the community could coordinate such a program.

Another likely problem in rural communities is finding a sufficient number of good training stations for job experience. Also, it was suggested that community businesses are reluctant to pay students for their work.

In terms of implementing "multi-co-op" programs within the current federal law, two problems were mentioned concerning record keeping: VEDS does not have a category for Multi-Occupational Cooperative, and accounting requires one to list cooperative expenditures as though it were a separate program rather than a process. It was also noted as a problem that the federal law and regulations require the state to prioritize funds for cooperative programs by unemployment and dropout rates.

Two state officials mentioned needing to sell this as a new idea, one noting the reluctance in small towns to "add another headache."

Rural Vocational Administrators

Several state administrators expressed concern about special problems confronted by small rural districts without vocational education directors. Closely related to previously reported responses for non-participation in federal programs, several local administrators shared this concern. One state tried to provide extra help to superintendents or principals who take on this role in addition to their many other functions but admitted that with high turnover in these positions, that it was a never-ending job.

The usual comments included that there was more paper work than money, and that with different rules, definitions and data requirements for the variety of federal education programs, superintendents with no or limited support staff just could not keep up to date and still do their other duties. One state administrator added, "They get so much paper on federal programs, they don't take time to read it. They are swamped--but they need money, need to be involved with federal funds."

Suggestions from both local and state administrators to ease the administrative burden of federal programs, including vocational, on small schools included: simpler forms; consistent definitions; a single data collection and reporting system; and better overall coordination among federal programs. Local administrators also asked for better information on

federal programs from state officials and more consistency in the implementation of federal regulations by the state.

Problems and Suggestions--Local

During the site visits, superintendents were asked in general about their problems and suggestions for vocational education.

Under problems, several topics have already been discussed including: teachers, facilities, travel distance, and community feelings against area schools. Another problem mentioned was the state regulations concerning minimum number needed to start a program. One superintendent had wanted to start an electronics program for five to six students, but that fell under the state minimum number. He felt that if he had been allowed to start the program, it would attract other students and grow to or above the minimum standard. Two problems concerned finances. First, that funding fluctuated greatly with small changes in student population in small schools. Another was the possible state property tax cut in one of the states visited. Both created uncertainty and made planning difficult for small districts, therefore discouraging new expenditures for vocational education and possibly having to cut current ones.

Each superintendent was asked if he [they all were men] had any specific problems with the current federal vocational law and regulations. The only specific mentioned had to do with lack of resources for matching in one district. All other comments were of a general nature, including the greater proportionate paperwork burden on small districts mentioned previously. Other general comments included that "[Federal] laws pertain to large comprehensive school districts. We can't compete, representatives need to see the size of rural schools. . ." Another said that state officials cannot answer questions on federal programs in general and that there is no consistency in how guidelines are applied. He was also concerned about various data requirements and how data are used, giving one illustration: "I have to supply information on needy kids for free school lunches. That information is confidential, private, so I guess. Then the state come along and uses 'free lunch' data to set my numbers for Title I ESEA!"

Specific suggestions for improving vocational programs for rural schools were relatively few. They are paraphrased below:

> Give money to colleges to make certified teachers qualified to teach vocational education.
>
> Mobile units for carpentry, auto mechanics, etc. (See innovations.)
>
> Need combination vocational teachers who could teach in two vocational areas. Work experience requirements make it difficult.
>
> Send money with no strings attached.

Superintendents were also asked what they would do if they had more funds for vocational education. As noted earlier, some expressed interest in expanding their industrial arts offerings and adding vocational agriculture, if they could find state qualified teachers. Others said they would use it for materials and equipment because they did not have enough students to add another program, while others would add a program to diversify their offerings. (See also Rural Vocational Administrators.)

Vocational Education Philosophy

Under this topic are those general comments about the mission or purpose of vocational education. (For related topics, see Industrial Arts and Career Education.) They are all from superintendents. Several raised general questions concerning the suitability of the traditional vocational approach in the current societal context and for their small schools. One superintendent acted on his beliefs, withdrawing his district from federal and state vocational funding and redesigning his vocational program. General comments are presented first, followed by a description of this one district's redesigned program and its rationale.

One superintendent spoke specifically to the philosophy of vocational education and how he feels it should be changed:

> Society has changed--the philosophy of vocational education should change. It should be exploratory, not preparing students for entry level positions. Students should have a broad education. They can specialize through postsecondary opportunities or in a trade.

Another superintendent questioned the necessity of having vocational education as a separate program:

> I want to give more life skills than job skills. We can have a vocationally oriented program without vocational education certification. I don't see the necessity of of having a separate program.

In terms of who are the target youth served by vocational education, another superintendent questioned how effective vocational education was in his small high school:

> I think the top 20 percent [of high school students] can take care of themselves. The bottom 50 percent need help and guidance. They used to be the target for vocational education--no longer. Programs are getting more sophisticated and blue collar pay is good now. Some of the bottom 50 percent are getting left out. We do not have enough programs to offer them--not enough of a choice or fit to their needs.

Another superintendent in one of the smaller districts visited evaluated his overall program differently from the above person: "The sharp kids don't get the challenge--average and slower kids do better because of more individualized attention." (To support his statement, he added that at the elementary level, only one student in his district scored below grade level on standardized tests.)

The incident to be described below is one of non-receipt of federal/state vocational funds, but it was entered here because of the philosophical rationale given by the superintendent. This district was larger than the others visited but was chosen for a site visit by state department personnel because of its decisions to withdraw from federal and state funding. Actually, the funding lost was very minimal, only $4,000 out of a total vocational budget of $60,000. The superintendent did not feel the money involved was worth the restrictions imposed by the state. The district has modified its vocational program to better meet its concept of the missions of vocational education.

As the superintendent described the issues, the state plan required vocational programs to be offered in two hour periods, limiting the number of students served. His district wanted more students to be served. Under state requirements, one instructor can serve only 60 students at a cost of $16,000. By dropping out of a state approved program, they could double the student load.

There were other advantages also, as perceived by the district. They now offer vocational subjects in one hour periods and they individualize the content. They can now mix beginners and advanced students (not allowed in state approved programs) and allow flexible time for students to reach competencies. They also can now use IA teachers where previously they had to have vocational credentials.

They increased their offerings from 12 to 30 per semester. The courses are now more introductory, less than the state would consider a full program. Enrollment has increased because more students are willing to take shorter courses than to make a long-term commitment. Almost 40 percent of the students take vocational subjects. Students are encouraged to take a variety of subjects, five or six skills, rather than having to declare commitment to one vocation. Industrial arts is now more an arts and craft program for junior high, and "vocational experience" is available for grades 10 to 12.

Philosophically, the program as redesigned does not aim to produce apprentice level workers but an introduction to various skills and trades. A large proportion of high school graduates go on to further education or training. The superintendent does not feel the new program has hurt the job market entry possibilities for those who do not go on for postsecondary experiences. (He added that this is in a non-union state.)

When asked under what conditions his district would be willing to once again apply for federal and state vocational funds, he said that state guidelines would have to be modified and the amount would have to be "enough."

Clearly, the above example was an exception but seemed a good example of how philosophy impacts program. In this case, it was state rather than federal regulations which were at issue.

The Vocational Education Act and Regulations

Almost all comments concerning this law in general or specific parts as related to rural programs came from state vocational administrators. Specific concerns are mentioned first, followed by more general comments.

Federal formula: It was called "absurd" by one state official. He explained his opinion, stating that relative ability to pay means nothing in states with a foundation formula, as all districts are "equalized"

by law.* He said the federal formula ignores state differences, as well as assuming urban and rural districts are the same.

Matching: One local administrator visited mentioned matching money as a problem, that with declining enrollments and state tax initiatives, any amount would be a problem. At the state level, it was suggested that it would be helpful to match in terms of a statewide rather than a local percentage. Although not specifically noted as a rural problem, it was added that if a local was on a tight budget, it would not be able to use all of the federal funds for which it was eligible. [The federal law allows the states the option of setting the proportion of state and local funds necessary to meet the match requirement. The local proportion can be set at zero.]

Set-asides: This topic drew more comment at the state level than any other specific area. Related specifically to rural areas, some questioned whether set-asides were necessary for small schools. One administrator noted that many small schools were not using them. One said rural schools had small classes anyway, and those districts felt that they did not need extra money to handle special children. One vocational administrator, formerly a vocational teacher, seemed almost insulted:

> . . . small schools have accommodated special kids in Voc. Ed.--previously we didn't identify them, we taught them. Now it is said that because we didn't identify them, we didn't serve them--not always true.

Another added, "I think all those [set-aside] areas are important, but that's all we are addressing. . . legislation is written to accommodate big cities/big states and their needs."

Federal definitions: The definition of disadvantaged, defined as not being able to progress in a regular program, was questioned as not necessarily suitable for rural schools. Also, it was noted that the definitions of disadvantaged and handicapped were different for vocational than other federal programs. It was said that rural districts often do not have the numbers to participate under the current law.

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*School finance experts have called into question whether state equalization schemes are effective in neutralizing differences in local fiscal capacities. (Reforming School Finance, Reischauer and Hartman, The Brookings Institution, 1973.)

Options: One state administrator complained about what he called the law's "optional laundry list." He noted that the federal government says they are options but then "seems to have the expectation that you would do all the options." (Industrial arts was given as an example.) Another added, "Pressure groups make options less than optional."

General Comments: Although questions about the Act were asked specific to rural vocational education, most of the general comments received expressed overall concerns. Sampling of general comments follow:

> Regulations tht accompany the law have a large impact on a small rural state--need a full time person to deal with implementation. If we could afford it, I would advise our state not to accept [federal vocational funds].

> Too many demands placed upon vocational education, OCR, sex equity, etc.--even more impact on small districts because they don't have administrators to deal with all federal programs, laws, and special requirements.

> Feds aren't really in a position to identify national needs because they are really a combination of state needs and we are closer to those. . . State and local [officials] both would like to have autonomy.

> We [vocational education] are overburdened. . . the federal government has not hit the universities or regular school programs as hard. . . using voc. ed. to handle social ills of this world. . . the job of voc. ed. is to train people to go to work. . . we are neglecting some people to do this. . . emphasis on social ills has sidetracked us from major problems, for example, youth unemployment. . .

> Basic law (1976) is good--regulations and rules are the problem. . . now spend a lot of our time keeping districts out of trouble.

> Vocational education is an economic-based program caught up in social legislation.

Federal Funds

Several comments from state officials related to the amount of federal controls relative to funds contributed (in both states visited, the state contributed more than enough to match the amount of federal money):

> Federal funds are the tail that wags the dog. Don't tell us how to use our state and local money to fund your [federal] programs.
>
> . . . so restrictive, stacks of regulations don't get to the real needs of our own states--it's not as though our state wasn't assuming responsibility.

In relation to other federal training programs, one administrator noted: "CETA can pay 100 percent, where vocational education pays only about 25 percent [of a local program]."

When asked what they might do with additional funds, comments included setting up a discretionary fund for opportunities not readily available under federal and state regulations. Another suggestion was to fund more sponsored programs in new and emerging areas (seed money) where school districts cannot afford the risks of uncertainty (example: alcohol fuels). Another would concentrate, as they do currently, on maintaining and expanding current and successful programs. There also was mention, as noted earlier, of funding industrial arts and exploratory type programs. Others mentioned: area school construction, summer and residential programs, and teachers shared among districts.

When asked what would happen if federal funds were to decrease or disappear entirely, one state administrator said: "It wouldn't look much different."

State Planning

The federally required state five year plan was considered worthwhile ("it makes us think"), but unrealistic ("can't do a good job, projections aren't good enough"). Another problem cited with the five year plan was that it made the program inflexible. As a state official explained: "It is revised annually but commitments are hard to change. . . We have trouble funding immediate needs."

Another aspect of state planning discussed had to do with attracting and planning for new industry. In one state visited, officials did not feel their vocational program had the flexibility to do this, nor that the state legislature wanted to give it, and further, were not sure that the citizens were "that much interested" in attracting industry. One administrator added that statewide needs do not always meet the teachers who are available and/or tenured.

In the other state visited, the vocational education unit was far more involved in attracting industry and preparing students for work in new industries (examples: mining and energy), although this was done mostly at the postsecondary level because it was said to be more flexible and could train faster than secondary. State vocational planners help both secondary and postsecondary administrators to develop programs to meet statewide needs as well as try to encourage schools to drop non-essential programs. When asked how the promotion of new industrial programs applied to rural areas and their needs, one planner said they "didn't really consider local needs that much with today's mobility"--and that they considered "local" industry input to be statewide when considering developing and supporting new vocational programs.

Research and Related Activities

(Covered under this topic will be state level comments on research, exemplary programs, and evaluation.)

The two states visited differed in their vocational research operation, as the smaller state department did not have a full-time research coordinator and was less active in this area. When asked about research related to rural schools, the larger state had recently funded a study on accessibility and success of regional vocational centers (now in progress). The other had none.

Both states had set aside some of the exemplary funds for small or rural schools. In the smaller state, an announcement had been sent out but no rural schools applied. The other state has had several exemplary programs in rural districts and described one where community persons were being trained to be part-time distributive education coordinators.

The research coordinator was "satisfied" with the current program improvement section: "I think we have the flexibility to deliver under program improvement; the state has flexibility to research a problem, pilot test, develop curriculum, and deliver teacher inservice.

Evaluation was an active process in both states. In one state, community review committees were required, one for each program, except in the small districts with less than four programs (almost all the rural ones) where districts can choose for a state person as reviewer instead of committees. Most choose the state person.

The other state evaluation system ranks every vocational program, from high to low, on given criteria. The criteria include cost efficiency and effectiveness (completion, placement, sex balance, and target groups). The bottom 20 percent are subject to immediate evaluation. If a program is in the bottom group "due to circumstances beyond control" (for example, cost effectiveness), funding will not be cut. The results tend to show problems in small schools, where low enrollments require high per pupil costs. Of interest was the fact that there were a couple of rural programs which ranked very high. The state person in charge of the evaluation, a new system, suggested it would be a good research project to compare those rural programs ranking very high versus those ranking very low.

IV. CONCLUSION

Summary of Concerns

This study of vocational education in rural secondary schools focused on districts that do not receive federal Vocational Education Act funds. Even though the numbers of students in rural districts without federal (or state) vocational funds seem to be relatively small from the sample surveyed, there are many more rural districts with minimal programs which are likely to share the concerns discussed in this report.

From talks on site with state level vocational administrators and rural school superintendents, a mix of topics arose which are specific to vocational education in rural schools, as well as including more general problems of rural education and topics concerning vocational education for all secondary schools. The study was very limited in resources and the issues discussed are done so with caution.

State vocational administrators and district superintendents emphasized different areas of concern. Problems with vocational education as cited by superintendents did not all stem from the federal legislation. As noted in the report, the most frequent concern voiced was for finding and retaining qualified teachers. This was seen as a general problem for rural high schools, which have additional difficulties in staffing for vocational programs, in that states require additional credentials beyond certification for teachers in state approved vocational programs. Industry also competes for persons with these same vocational skills and can offer higher salaries.

Superintendents also related their districts non-participation in state approved vocational programs to the small numbers of students involved, the small amounts of funds available, and the "paper-work burden" of participating in vocational and other federal programs. Complaints included having to fill out the same forms and comply with the same data requirements as large districts, as well as the difficulty of keeping up with changes in the laws and regulations. Superintendents sometimes felt state administrators did not supply sufficient information on federal regulations and were not consistent in applying them. In some cases, superintendents were unsure whether a regulation with which they were concerned was state or federal, and the specifics also were often confused.

Another reason for district non-participation in state approved vocational programs was the desire to have students participate in the more exploratory-type program of industrial arts. This was both for the convenience of small numbers, making specialized courses less practical, and for philosophical reasons. Some of the philosophical reasons were rural-based, i.e., that students can be better prepared to work in rural communities with a broad base of skills. Others were more general, that students should not make career commitments in their early teens but should try out many skill areas.

The study addressed two other possible routes for rural high school students to participate (other than at their local high school), through area vocational schools or by contracting with other districts. Two distinct reasons for not doing this emerged. The first was practical, because of travel distances and travel costs, as well as tuition costs. The small numbers of students to be sent, as well as the maintenance of an adequate staff for those remaining, also was a practical consideration. The second reason was political and included bad feeling carried over from consolidation efforts as well as community fears of losing the local high school.

At the state level, there were more concerns expressed specific to the Vocational Education Act and its regulations. The state vocational administrators interviewed generally felt the amount of federal control exercised over the state's vocational education program was disproportionately high in relation to the amount of money the federal government contributed, and overly restrictive as compared with federal regulation of other educational programs. "The tail that wags the dog" was one administrator's image. The 1976 amendments and their accompanying regulations, especially the "set-asides," were severely criticized as putting an unfair burden on the vocational program and distracting it from its real purpose. The feeling was that vocational education had been singled out to cure contemporary social ills as opposed to its true mission of preparing people for work.

There was minimal attention evidenced at the state level of a need to consider rural schools differently. Although there was an understanding at the state level of the rural desire for generalized skill training through industrial arts, and also an awareness of the need for career

education, such programs were not considered (in the states visited) as the responsibility of vocational education. Such programs would be positively considered only if additional funds, specified for small schools, were provided. Only one new vocational program, multi-occupational cooperative education, was evidence of the provision of special program guidelines for rural schools. Other innovative practices which seemed to have potential for rural schools were the mixing of secondary and postsecondary students at area schools (thus increasing the possible program offerings in areas of limited student numbers), and contracting with community colleges to provide vocational programs at the local school (thus reducing the administrative burden, travel costs, and travel time).

Some topics were noticeable by the lack of comment they received in the rural districts visited. Community involvement and promotion of sex equity were two of these. Little community involvement in vocational programs was reported in the schools visited. Traditional sex roles were evidenced by enrollment patterns in most vocational courses.

Policy Implications for Rural Vocational Programs

The concerns voiced in this study are to be looked at by NIE in conjunction with the results of the other NIE contracted studies of vocational education in rural areas. Also, at the time of writing this report, data from the UCB study on funds distribution was not available for review. The following policy implications from this study are premature, in the sense that the overall analysis process is incomplete. Therefore, these implications could be considered more as questions needing further consideration.

Should federal and/or state vocational education authorities provide special consideration for rural schools desiring vocational programs? If the answer to this question is positive, then the concerns voiced in this study point to several possibilities for intervention.

The type of vocational program most suitable for small rural schools needs to be considered before teacher problems can be meaningfully addressed. For example, should small schools be allowed, encouraged, or even required to offer an industrial arts or multi-skill exploratory type programs? If yes, then the quality of such programs also would need to be addressed from both the need to update and further develop curriculum and provide related teacher preservice and inservice training.

Once such program decisions are made, then the problems of recruiting and retaining teachers, and what skills they need to be "qualified," can be addressed. What should be the standards for teachers who teach in these redesigned rural vocational programs? Is specialized training and/or work experience necessary? Should there be a special incentives program to attract teachers to vocational programs to rural areas? If teacher training programs need to be modified or improved, should this begin on an inservice or preservice basis?

Policy decisions concerning vocational program content and teacher standards currently are more state controlled than federal. Should the federal government devise a rural vocational policy and use its funds to influence state administration? What should be the state and local role in setting policy? Should the federal influence extend beyond that part of the program which it supports?

In viewing vocational programs in the larger educational context, three additional policy areas were implied in conversations with local superintendents. First is the question of whether vocational education should become more integrated into the regular education program and more available to all students. Although this question could be applied to all schools, it has more practical implications for rural schools with small numbers of students and teachers. In these schools, the feasibility of conducting one or more separate and specialized vocational programs is less.

The second area relates to the relative isolation of students in rural communities. Although not specifically a vocational concern, vocational training could be a basis for providing student learning experiences outside the local community. These experiences could be skill learning (classroom) or practice (on-the-job), or both, and could take place during the school year, regularly, on an intensive basis, or during the summer. Students attending postsecondary institutions on a part-time basis and the possibility of residential programs already have been mentioned. Another option might be urban/rural student exchanges which would allow for mutual sharing of lifestyles as well as skill learning.

The third area, community involvement, again is not one specific to vocational programs but an overall rural education concern which could be addressed through new vocational thrusts. There was little evidence in

the communities visited of community input into the vocational programs nor support from the school for community development. Whether this is a general condition and the reasons for it deserve further attention.

Some Final Thoughts

The purpose of this brief study was to document state and local concerns about the Vocational Education Act as it applies to secondary schools. The concerns found were many, but involve not only the federal law, but also its interaction with state programs and how they are administered, plus general concerns of rural educators and about vocational education.

The topics discussed point to three major issues beyond the specifics of the Vocational Education Act. The first, the philosophy of vocational education, was openly discussed during the site visits and has been described previously in this report. The second concerns the future of small rural high schools. This issue was touched on only indirectly at state and local levels. The third involves federal control, its scope, and its implementation.

Before one can determine the specific needs of vocational education in rural schools (or in any school), it is necessary to agree on the intent of the program, its target audience, and the criteria by which it will be judged. There seems to be disagreement among some rural superintendents with the traditional philosophy of vocational education as providing intensive training in a chosen skill area at the secondary level. The preference for industrial arts and multi-occupational programs was an indicator of the concern.

Secondly, there appeared to be an ambivalence at the state level about providing special support for vocational programs in small schools, if this special support would prolong the life of a high school whose overall existence was considered questionable. In this sense, questions concerning vocational services are part of a larger question about the future of small rural high schools in general. Should state and federal policies be neutral, supportive, or detrimental to small rural high schools?

The third issue of federal control is not particular to vocational education and is so familiar it need not be discussed here. Vocational education presents a case of federal regulations influencing state and local programs through provision of partial funding. Whether this should

be done, and how efficient and effective it is in programmatic terms, is at issue. Specific to rural schools, the impact of federal regulations and the administrative processes required are among the factors which discourage participation in vocational programs.*

Neither the question of vocational education philosophy, nor the future of small rural high schools, nor the issue of federal control have simple answers. They are questions of values and, in the opinion of the investigator, are basic to almost all of the concerns discussed in this report.

Further, they are questions which need to be addressed at all levels--federal, state, and local--if there is a sincere desire to act constructively on the problems of providing vocational education in rural communities.

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*The author has been made aware of one state which is seriously considering not accepting any VEA funds because of increased state and local reporting requirements.

Appendix

Site Visit Information

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May-June, 1980

Study Title: NON-RECEIPT OF FEDERAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FUNDS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL-EDUCATION RELATED ISSUES IN RURAL/SPARSELY SETTLED AREAS

This small study is funded by a National Institute of Education grant to me, to be carried out in conjunction with the University of California Berkeley Project on National Vocational Education Resources. Its emphasis is on those districts which do not receive federal vocational education funds.

It is important to emphasize that this is a small study, intended primarily to document issues in need of further study. It is one of several small rural studies in the much larger vocational education study being done by NIE under Congressional mandate.

The following questions/issues are among the topics that have arisen from my review reports and discussions at federal and state levels. They are listed here to suggest areas you might like to tell me about but are certainly not exhaustive nor meant to limit the scope of our discussion.

For Districts Who Do Not Receive Federal Vocational Education Funds:

For what reasons are you not eligible or do you choose not to apply?

Are your students served by regional or other districts' programs?

Do you have your own local courses or program of vocational education?

What do you offer and how might it differ from other programs in the state?

What would you consider the minimum amount of federal money that would be useful for vocational education in your district and what might you do with the funds?

What do you see as the major needs or issues?

For Districts Who Do Recieve Federal Vocational Education Funds:

If you were to lose your federal vocational education funds, what would happen to your district's program?

If you were to receive twice the amount of federal funds that you now receive, what might you do with it?

For All Rural Districts and State Officials:

In relation to rural districts, do you have concerns or suggestions about the Vocational Education: law, regulations, administration, definitions, and/or evaluation requirements?

What do you see as the greatest difficulties in providing Vocational Education in small isolated schools? Program needs?

Do you know of any especially effective or innovative Vocational Education program in rural schools, either by program content or delivery? Any research studies?